

WASHINGTON TIMES  
25 September 1985**PRUDEN ON  
POLITICS**By  
Wesley Pruden**The many voices  
speaking as two**

If the Reagan administration is so sure it knows what the Russians are really up to, why doesn't it frighten its critics into silence?

Why doesn't the administration show — show, not tell — the public 10 percent of the evidence it has about what the evil empire wants to do with the world?

These are the questions that frequently occur to the administration's friends, who know what the stakes are in the twilight struggle between East and West. Sometimes the heavy thinkers at the top of the Reagan government act as if they don't really believe all that scary stuff.

Their problem is that, like most of the scoffers in the media, in the universities, and in the think tanks, the administration's strategists and thinkers tend to hang out only with people who think like they do, talk like they do, write like they do.

Denis Clift, the deputy director for external affairs at the Defense Intelligence Agency, talked to a law-and-national security committee of the American Bar Association yesterday and the response he got with his cool recitation of Soviet aims was startling.

Most of his material had been talked about before by the Pentagon, and some of it has even been published in a book, "Soviet Military Power." A lot of what he told the lawyers was available in stories published months ago in their hometown newspapers, in newsmagazines, and even talked about briefly on network news programs.

Yesterday, Mr. Clift's grim assessment, delivered as the matter of facts that it is, left the audience of lawyers and business executives silenced where they sat. Stunned may not be too strong a word to describe them. They acted as if they had never heard any of this stuff before.

And in fact, most of them hadn't, because they haven't been listening.

Mr. Clift and his colleagues in the government say they want to start a great public debate. "The information, the data is there for the debate to take place. But . . . the American public has to want it to take place."

"The government believes that its figures are facts," he said.

No doubt. But the government's facts have to compete for attention with a lot of other facts. Most Americans have neither the inclination nor knowledge to worry about the government's facts. Their own "facts" — their jobs, their families, their aches and pains, the fortunes of their favorite football teams — are more immediate, and hence more real.

"Too often," said Mr. Clift, "we focus on one aspect of the Soviet Union's military power, without taking the time to stand back and look at the range of Soviet developments."

Americans, he said, should be concerned with what the Soviets are doing by building up their "heavily layered" system of satellites. If they would worry about that they might be terrified of what they intend to do with those satellites, radars and advanced missile interceptors which is giving the Soviets "the capability to develop a national anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense should they choose to do so."

But crying doom is always thankless. Nobody likes to hear bad news, particularly when it costs money. Making sport of doom-criers, on the other hand, is easy to do. Talking about peace is even easier. Some of the people at The Washington Post and at the television networks do it all the time, and most of them are not even very clever.

They get by with it (they even get laughs with it) not because most people accept their premise — that the American government and the Soviet government are equally evil — but because most people aren't really very interested in listening to people in Washington jaw-jaw at each other, even when the topic is war-war.

When the president and his secretary of state talk about how they're all looking forward to meeting Mr. Gorbachev in Geneva, a lot of people, maybe most people, believe it.

But if they believe that, how can they believe the horror stories about what Mr. Gorbachev's government is really up to?

*Wesley Pruden is managing editor of The Times.*